

BOOKS

The Great Battles of Antiquity: A Strategic and Tactical Guide to Great Battles That Shaped the Development of War by Richard A. Gabriel and Donald W. Boose, Jr., Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 714 pages, \$95.00.

There is something romantic and exciting about the study of antiquity. Whether it is the study of the culture of ancient Egypt, the rise of the Grecian city-states, or the grandeur that was the Roman Empire, something always draws me to any book dealing with the ancient world. I am especially intrigued by any book or author that examines ancient military systems and the battles of antiquity. In our post-Cold War world, however, soldiers and the study of military history, especially ancient military history, seem relegated to the intellectual trash heap. In a direct challenge to this short-sighted view, Richard A. Gabriel and Donald W. Boose have co-authored *The Great Battles of Antiquity*, a well-written book grand in scope and design, and worthy of study by soldiers and statesmen alike.

The authors begin their study with the Battle of Megiddo in 1479 B.C. and end with the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Their goal is to distill "a number of strategic and tactical lessons that may aid in providing useful insights to the modern-day soldier and statesman." (p. xxv) Thirty-two battles and campaigns are analyzed around four categories. The first category, "Strategic Setting," covers the political and strategic context of the battle or campaign, while "The Antagonists" assesses the doctrine, organization, and leadership of the armies involved. A detailed account of the battle(s) is the third category, with the final category, "Lessons of War," providing guideposts for the modern-day soldier and statesman. Gabriel and Boose accomplish their purpose marvelously throughout the book.

The breadth and depth of this book is worthy of volumes, but the four-step methodology employed by the authors serves them well in limiting its scope. The physical construction of *The Great Battles of Antiquity* allows readers to "browse" through a single battle or campaign at their leisure. Each chapter concentrates on a single battle or group of battles (The Campaigns of Hannibal for example), without the need to read the book sequentially. Because each chapter is constructed identically within the context of the four categories of analysis, I was able to move smoothly from Alexander the Great to the Battle of Hastings.

The analysis in all four categories is superb. The authors are meticulous in their presentation of the impact of culture on warfare. For those who eschew the study of culture and its impact on military and political processes, this book serves as a

primer on how to integrate culture into military history without diluting the importance of either in society. The authors are at their best when analyzing a series of battles or campaigns, such as those by Hannibal or Alexander the Great. They also do not suffer from the myopia of Eurocentrism, but incorporate the warfare practiced by the Chinese, Koreans, Mongols, and Japanese.

While the four-step analysis process serves Gabriel and Boose well throughout the book, they present the final section "Lessons of War," in the form of bullet comments that would be at home on any briefer's slide. For all of their effort in the preceding three sections, they could have closed each chapter more effectively had they tied their comments together in effective prose. As it is, many of their lessons take on the appearance of maxims, seemingly divorced from the context in which they were made. While a "bullet comment" approach works for the military reader, I feel it fails the civilian.

There is little doubt that warfare is a social institution among human beings. Regardless of the date of the battle or campaign, there is one constant — the human being. Although the weapons and tactics of warfare have changed and evolved considerably from the time of the Battle of Megiddo, the essential human element remains constant. Gabriel and Boose effectively examine the efforts of our ancestors, and bridge the centuries to show us the timeliness of the study of ancient military history. Perhaps instead of looking for the evanescent lessons from the Gulf War, we should turn to the timeless nature of the problems encountered by the Great Captains of the past.

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Panthers in the Shadows by Scott Hamilton. HPS Simulations, P.O. Box 3245, Santa Clara, CA 95055, \$59.95. Internet 74774.771@Compuserve.com.

System Requirements: Minimum 386 CPU, VGA monitor, 2 MB RAM, DOS.

Panthers in the Shadows is, without a doubt, the most detailed and realistic tactical-level armor simulation currently on the computer market. *Panthers* allows computer owners to do something new: apply actual armor tactics to a computer game. Designer Scott Hamilton (an ex-Engineer officer) of HPS Simulations has done an incredible job of creating a program that is more simulation than game.

The strength of *Panthers* lies in the tactical scale and the rich variety of the weapons offered. The simulation has a scale of 100 meters per hex and one minute per

turn, with units representing platoons or sections of vehicles, AT guns, mortars, artillery, or infantry platoons. Losses are taken by individual vehicle and individual infantryman. There are over 1,000 weapons systems in the database, along with over 1,500 types of ammunition. APC, APCBC, HEAT, HE, APCR, smoke, canister, illumination, and a slew of other ammunition types are available for use by the appropriate weapons. Battles may be fought at night, in rain or snow, or in a howling windstorm, as the program allows for a full range of climatic conditions. In addition, there are wire and obstacles, minefields, paratroops and gliders, naval gunfire support, engineers, flamethrowers, and airstrikes. Virtually every armored vehicle and weapon that fought in the Western theater during WWII is covered. As I've told my friends, "any simulation with 43 different types of Sherman tanks available is worth investigating!"

As an armor officer, the real attraction *Panthers* has for me is the ability to use real tactics and doctrine successfully. In *Panthers*, it pays to use your forces doctrinally, and to advance with elements in overwatch. The player who uses a combined arms approach and masses his forces will see definite results with this program. Using smoke, covered and concealed routes to the objective, and coordinating artillery missions (which have delay times) are reminiscent of miniatures gaming, except with computer-driven assistance. Miniatures enthusiasts will appreciate the fact that *Panthers* differentiates between front, side, front turret, side turret, and rear armor, and calculates penetration based on kinetic energy versus the armor thickness modified by the angle of incidence of the strike. Armor enthusiasts will appreciate a computer program that accurately depicts the feeling of armored combat at the tactical level.

The simulation has three levels of difficulty, can be played against an AI opponent or by e-mail against another person, and comes with nine canned scenarios and a scenario builder. The scenario builder can cover any battle in the Western and North African fronts during WWII from 1940 to 1945, and includes French, British, U.S., Italian, Dutch, Belgian, and German force structures. Factors such as morale, training level, ammunition dud rate, weather, counterbattery fire, air superiority, and visibility are fully adjustable.

There is really very little negative to say about the program, although the sound effects are rudimentary at best and usually get turned off quickly. This is in contrast to *Panzer General*, another currently popular computer program. But *Panzer General*, despite superb sound effects and graphics, is really nothing more than a computer game with a historical backdrop. *Panthers in the Shadows*, with average sound effects and graphics, is a superb computer simula-

tion of armored warfare, which can be used to illustrate the synchronization of forces so necessary to win. I highly recommend this program for all computer-literate armor officers.

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Tiger Ace: The Life Story of Panzer Commander Michael Wittmann by Gary L. Simpson, Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1994. 394 pages. \$35.00, hardcover.

The exploits of Michael Wittmann have taken on a legendary quality in the annals of military history. This book lends credence to the title military historians have given to Michael Wittmann — that of the greatest tank commander in World War II. *Tiger Ace* chronicles the life of a man who was personally responsible for destroying 138 armored fighting vehicles and another 132 antitank and artillery pieces during five years of fighting.

Author Gary Simpson begins the book with five pages that describe Wittmann's experiences growing up on the family farm. It was on the farm that Wittmann learned the values of diligence, caring, open-mindedness, and decisiveness that would serve him well as a military leader. More importantly according to Simpson, Michael Wittmann developed his love and respect for mechanical vehicles while working on the farm. Throughout the remainder of the book, Simpson repeatedly reminds the reader that Wittmann's actions on the battlefield are directly related to his experiences on the farm.

At the age of twenty, Wittmann volunteered for the German Reichs Arbeitsdienst (German Voluntary Labor Service) and served for six months before enlisting in the German Wehrmacht as an infantryman in October 1934. After two years, Wittmann joined the Leibstandarte, Hitler's personal bodyguard regiment. Simpson is careful to point out that Wittmann joined the SS because he wanted to be one of the elite, and not because he shared the same political philosophy. Wittmann found the training to be harder and more realistic than in the regular army, with a greater emphasis placed on being aggressive on the battlefield. Wittmann served as an armored car commander during the Polish Campaign in 1939 and the German attacks in the West in 1940. Upon the fall of France, Wittmann was selected for training and commanding the new Sturmgeschütz III (StuG III — assault gun). He served as a StuG III commander during the Balkan Campaign and the first year of Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. In June 1942, Wittmann attended the SS officer cadet school. Wittmann's performance at the

school and on the battlefield enabled him to become one of the first to command the new Panzerkampfwagen VI 'Tiger.'

Wittmann assumed command of a Tiger platoon and fought on the Russian Front beginning in January of 1943. He participated in all the major battles on the Russian front from March 1943 to March 1944, to include the recapture of Kharkov, the battle for Kursk, and the desperate fight to defend Kiev. Wittmann's Tiger platoon performed superbly in all these battles, accomplishing almost every mission assigned, but it was Wittmann and his crew's performance over this time period that earned them great distinction. During the Battle of Kursk, Wittmann's tank destroyed 30 T34/76 tanks and 29 AT guns in four days. Later, in November 1943, Wittmann's Tiger destroyed 16 tanks and 12 AT guns in one day. By January 14, 1944, Wittmann's Tiger totaled 88 enemy tanks destroyed, earning him and his gunner, Bobby Woll, each a Knight's Cross. That same day, after the awards were presented, Wittmann's Tiger destroyed 19 Russian tanks. As a result, on January 30, 1944, Wittmann received the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross and a promotion to the rank of Obersturmführer (1st Lieutenant). Simpson's account of the battles on the Russian Front try to describe the constant and ferocious fighting, but it is beyond the author's limited writing abilities.

In February 1944, Wittmann assumed command of the 2nd Company, SS-Pzr Abt. 101, a Tiger company within Leibstandarte's Tiger Detachment. The entire division moved to Belgium to reequip and reorganize after a year of heavy fighting in Russia. It was on the Western Front that the world would witness Wittmann's most spectacular feat and his controversial death. On June 13, 1944, Wittmann and his crew destroyed 25 armored fighting vehicles and stopped the advance of the British 22nd Armored Brigade at Villers Bocage in Normandy, France. Wittmann received the Swords to the Knight's Cross and a promotion to Hauptmann (Captain) for his efforts that day.

On August 8, 1944, Michael Wittmann died in battle near St. Aignan-de-Cramesnil. Author Gary Simpson's account of Michael Wittmann's death is very definite — a Sherman Firefly commanded by a British Lieutenant James. Simpson does not mention the current controversy as to how Wittmann died and who should receive claim. Whether this is a result of Simpson's research or ignorance is unknown due to his poor documentation.

The book contains numerous previously unpublished photographs of Michael Wittmann and his crew. The photographs lend credence to the author's statements of Wittmann as a young, vibrant, and caring leader. Unfortunately, the author does not include any maps to assist in his description of Wittmann's military operations, not even of the route that Wittmann used at

Villars Bocage. Instead, the writer unsuccessfully attempts to paint a picture with his narrative of each operation.

When I first found *Tiger Ace*, I anticipated a hard-edged account of the life of Michael Wittmann as a small unit leader. I could not have been more disappointed. The book is poorly written and is full of clichés and redundancies. Even worse, the atrocious editing makes the book almost too hard to read. Simple grammar rules, like subject-verb agreements and avoiding sentence fragments, are not observed. The poor writing makes me question the scholarship of the author. Also, the book unintentionally makes Wittmann look like a tank commander and never a small unit leader. The author usually writes about the commands that Michael Wittmann used to fight his tank, but rarely mentions any of the tactics or fire commands that Wittmann used to fight his platoon and company.

The inside cover of the book claims that Gary Simpson conducted extensive research and travel in preparation for this book. Unfortunately, the majority of the research focused on the Battle of Villars Bocage, and not on Wittmann's exploits prior to Normandy. The author documents his interviews with Wittmann's widow, members of the 22nd Armored Brigade, and Oberstleutnant Jurgen Wessel (Wittmann's deputy commander in Normandy) in annexes in the back of the book, but fails to do so in the main text. Simpson also used recorded interviews with the propaganda ministry and personal material that Wittmann's widow presented to him. Since the majority of the author's research focused on the Battle of Villars Bocage, this is the most readable and interesting chapter in the book. Finally, although the publisher claims that this is the first comprehensive study of Michael Wittmann, this is not true. Dr. Gregory Jones wrote and published *Panzerheld: The Story of Hauptmann Michael Wittmann* in 1993 (reviewed in the March-April 1994 *ARMOR*).

Simpson's *Tiger Ace* is a book that falls far short of its great potential. Only the most die-hard military historians should read this book. Anyone interested in the life of Michael Wittmann and the tactics he used is better served by Dr. Jones' book on Michael Wittmann.

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Lucky War: Third Army in Desert Storm by Richard M. Swain (reviewed in our September-October 1995 issue) is available from the Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-6900.